

Forward in Christ

A LUTHERAN VOICE



God's flow of blessings

Praise God for all his blessings—
whether spiritual or physical. *Page 10*

MORE THAN A STORY


This Is Christ the King

Since the moment the shepherds first shared the account of our Savior's birth, listeners have been in awe: "All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them." NPH provides books and gifts that share with the world the awesome truth that Jesus is more than a story—he was and always will be Christ the King.




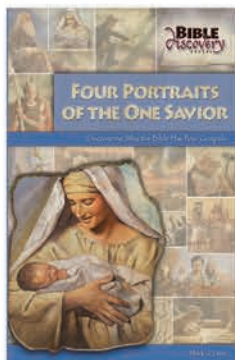
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POSTMASTER

Send address changes to Forward in Christ, c/o Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284.


Forward in Christ (ISSN 1541-8936) is published monthly through Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284. Periodical postage paid at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and additional mailing offices.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Print: USA—\$17.99; Canada—\$18.89; all other countries—air mail \$71.99. Digital: USA—\$15.99; Canada—\$16.79; all other countries—\$15.99. Premium: USA—\$18.99; Canada—\$19.94; all other countries—air mail \$72.99. Postage included, payable in advance to Northwestern Publishing House. Contact Northwestern Publishing House for multi-year, blanket, and bundle rates. Northwestern Publishing House, 1250 N 113 St, Milwaukee WI 53226-3284; 800-662-6093. Milwaukee area, 414-615-5785. nph.net/periodicals.

ON AUDIO

Mission for the Visually Impaired, 375 Bridgepoint Dr, South St. Paul, MN 55075; 651-291-1536.

 Indicates additional online content

COVER IMAGE: iSTOCK

May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. — 1 KINGS 8:57

WHAT'S INSIDE

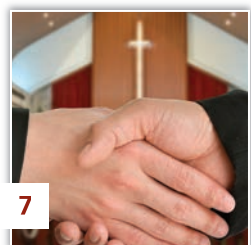
This month on our pages you get to meet Alan. And Dylan. And J. T. And Wade. Who are these people? They are people who needed to hear about Jesus and his amazing grace. They needed answers—real answers, not the ones the world gives. They needed to understand that they are sinners but that God so loved the world that he freely gave his Son Jesus to die on the cross—for them.

They needed someone like you to tell them. And someone did just that!

This month we start a new series called “Ambassadors: Help them find Jesus” to help you as you tell others about the hope that you have. Each month our writers will share stories and tips about witnessing, advice that, we pray, will assist you as you reach out to your friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors with the gospel message. Turn to the first article on page 28 to learn about what the backbone of our witness is: the Bible.

Who are the people whom you have met and shared the gospel with? What was your experience—whether good or bad? We want to hear from you! E-mail us at fic@wels.net and introduce us to the people in your life who need the gospel and tell us how you let your light shine in their lives.

Julie Wietzke



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EVANGELISM LESSONS

Thank you so very much for your article on evangelism ["Evangelism lessons from the Savior," Sept.]. The beauty of your story was truly heart-rendering. Your story brought a tear to my eyes as I read it and now again as I write this.

May God richly bless all those who read this story to be bold, but loving, in Christ as we share his wonderful gospel to a dying world.

*Jack Uber
Schertz, Texas*

"CONFESSIONS OF FAITH" SERIES

In the April edition you asked us to write in to say what we appreciate most about the "Confessions of faith" series, which has been running in the magazine for 10 years.

I appreciate all of them that I have read so far, which has been since May 2017 when I myself started attending a WELS church, Rock of Ages in Nashville, Tenn.

It has been eye-opening to say the least, even after being a Christian for a very long time. My story is very similar to many of the stories!

I do love this feature of the magazine!

*Keleen Carlson
Hendersonville, Tennessee*

Send your letters to Feedback, *Forward in Christ*, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; fic@wels.net. Letters between 100 and 200 words are preferred. Include full name and address. Letters are edited for clarity, conciseness, and relevance. Not all letters received can be acknowledged or used. Writers' views are not necessarily those of WELS or *Forward in Christ*.

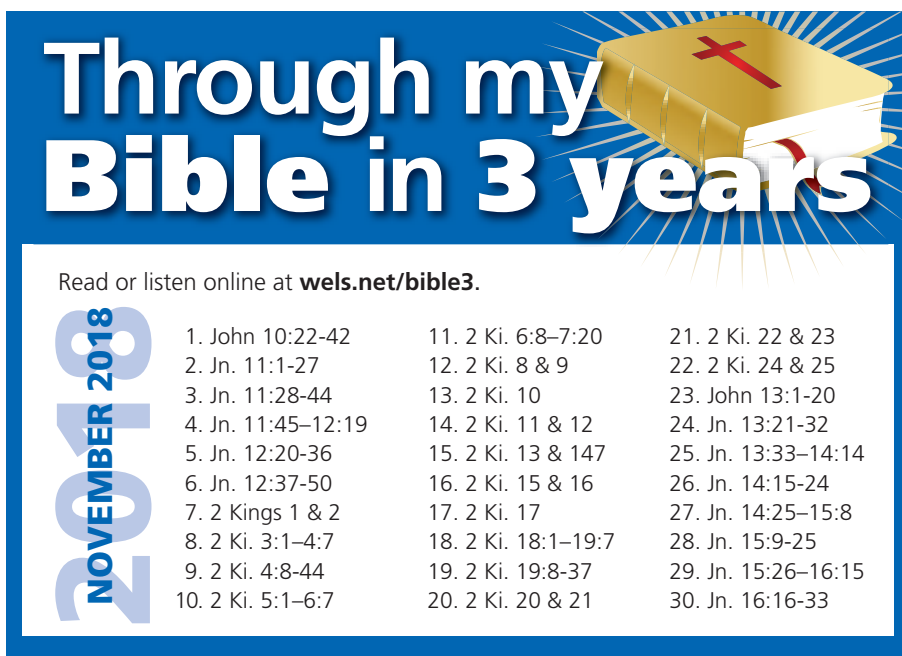


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NOVEMBER 2018

1. John 10:22-42	11. 2 Ki. 6:8-7:20	21. 2 Ki. 22 & 23
2. Jn. 11:1-27	12. 2 Ki. 8 & 9	22. 2 Ki. 24 & 25
3. Jn. 11:28-44	13. 2 Ki. 10	23. John 13:1-20
4. Jn. 11:45-12:19	14. 2 Ki. 11 & 12	24. Jn. 13:21-32
5. Jn. 12:20-36	15. 2 Ki. 13 & 147	25. Jn. 13:33-14:14
6. Jn. 12:37-50	16. 2 Ki. 15 & 16	26. Jn. 14:15-24
7. 2 Kings 1 & 2	17. 2 Ki. 17	27. Jn. 14:25-15:8
8. 2 Ki. 3:1-4:7	18. 2 Ki. 18:1-19:7	28. Jn. 15:9-25
9. 2 Ki. 4:8-44	19. 2 Ki. 19:8-37	29. Jn. 15:26-16:15
10. 2 Ki. 5:1-6:7	20. 2 Ki. 20 & 21	30. Jn. 16:16-33



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Give thanks for gospel partnership

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:3-6

Peter M. Prange

It's worth celebrating.

Exactly 150 years ago last month, on Oct. 21–22, 1868, ten pastors representing two church bodies met in Milwaukee to discuss possible gospel partnership.

UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

For more than a decade, their Lutheran synods made accusations and counter-accusations, especially in print. In many ways, they hadn't really taken the time to listen to one another and to understand one another's story in Christian love. But now they put down their swords for a moment, opened their Bibles and their hearts together, and discovered a wonderful reality: They shared "the unity of the Spirit," a unity God had called them to keep "through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

After less than two days, these representatives of the Wisconsin and Missouri Synods recognized each other as members of "orthodox Lutheran church bodies" and resolved to "practice pulpit and altar fellowship." The Missouri Synod's theological giant, C. F. W. Walther, was said to have uttered a memorable lament about his newly discovered Wisconsin brothers: "If we had known all this before, we might have been united ten years ago already" (*The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, pp. 129,130).

It is a rare thing when believers agree on the teaching of Scripture. It is sad to note that even this great fellowship has deteriorated and broken since that start 150 years ago.

FELLOWSHIP OF FAITH

Fellowship is a precious blessing. The apostle Paul understood not only how precious it was but how important. As a faithful apostle of Jesus, he was de-



termined to celebrate the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace and to be thankful to God for his gospel partnership with others.

**We can thank God that
we are not alone in
our knowledge and
trust of Jesus as the
world's only Savior.**

True, Paul had a sharp, theological mind and could debate scriptural teaching with the best of them (Acts 9:20-22; 17:2-4). When people stubbornly denied indisputable, scriptural truths, he shook the dust off his feet and moved on (Acts 13:46-51; 18:4-8).

But Paul craved unity and pursued it feverishly. Like Jesus, he was patient toward those who trusted in the Savior yet struggled to grasp his sometimes "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:15,16) teaching. Paul learned that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Corinthi-

ans 8:1). He realized that even inspired apostles were not finished products in knowing and understanding every sacred truth (1 Corinthians 13:12). God's broken people live and die by faith alone, hopeful that the Spirit who began the "good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Only then will knowledge and understanding be perfectly complete.

Until then, God's people stumble along together imperfectly, united spiritually in the bond of peace. Yes, there are believers in many visible churches, but we don't all believe the same. Sadly, we note those who do not teach God's truth and avoid them for the sake of our own faith and to be faithful witnesses to God's truth—like Paul. But we can thank God that we are not alone in our knowledge and trust of Jesus as the world's only Savior. So we celebrate our deeper blessed fellowship of faith, pray for others with joy, and give thanks for the Lord's work in creating faith in human hearts.

It's worth celebrating.

Contributing editor Peter Prange is pastor at Bethany, Kenosha, Wisconsin.



Mark Schwab

We carry out the same mission as those first-century believers, and like them, we are reminded wherein the success of our mission lies.

Same message, same power, same promise

Does this sound familiar to you?

- A world that is hostile to God and to all that he stands for.
- A society and a culture that is focused on materialism and the all-consuming desire for pleasure.
- A culture in which traditional moral values are eroding, where families are disintegrating, where human life is devalued, and where violence is rampant.
- A world obsessed with all things sexual, and in which unspeakable perversions are not only tolerated but glorified.
- A society that embraces a belief system that denies absolute truth and rejects any distinction between right and wrong, good and evil.
- A world in which Christian beliefs and teachings are attacked and ridiculed.
- A religious scene in which false teachers entice more and more people with their deceptions and lies.

If you think that sounds like the world and the culture we live in, you would certainly not be wrong. But, in fact, this is also a description of the Roman world at the end of the first century—the very world in which God placed his first New Testament believers to carry out their God-given mission.

It's tempting to look around and conclude that the world we live in is worse than ever before and that today's challenges of reaching unbelieving souls with the gospel are greater than in the past. But, in reality, things today are no different from the Roman world and pagan culture. And just as today's world presents the same challenges to God's church, so it also has the same opportunities for the power of the gospel to work in the hearts of people.

Consider what God did in that world of the first century. It was only a handful

of disciples that gathered around their risen Savior on a hill outside Jerusalem just before he ascended. Jesus sent that little group into a hostile world on what must have seemed like an impossible mission. But armed with the power of God's Word and with the unbreakable promises he had given them, those first believers did not retreat from that challenge. When Jesus told them to go, they went—with joy, with commitment, and with confidence.

And God blessed their witness. The book of Acts tells us repeatedly that as God's people proclaimed the gospel, the Word of the Lord grew—despite the challenges and opposition. As the Holy Spirit worked, the Word grew in the hearts of people. It grew eventually to cross the oceans and to span the centuries. It grew and spread to the point where, through the faithful witness of generations of God's people, it came to you and to me.

The gospel still faces hostility and opposition in today's unbelieving world. But that powerful gospel is still at work, changing hearts, changing lives, and changing eternities. We carry out the same mission as those first-century believers, and like them, we are reminded wherein the success of our mission lies. Our mission and our witness does not depend on us, on our own cleverness, on our willpower, or on our abilities. Nor is its effectiveness in slick programs or effective marketing strategies. The strength and success of our mission is found in the power, faithfulness, and love of a God whose Spirit works through the proclamation of his Word and the administration of his sacraments. The success of our mission lies completely in the hands of the One who has promised us that his Word will not return to him empty and that the gates of hell itself will not be able to overcome his church.

Light for our path

Where in the Bible do I find that we rise to the east at the resurrection?

James F. Pope

Addressing your question provides an opportunity to look at cemetery layouts, worship spaces, and the Last Day.

ISING TO A DIRECTION

There is no passage in the Bible that states definitively that the dead will rise to the east, but over the years Christians have used various Bible passages as a reason for burying the dead with an eastward orientation: facing the east. Matthew 24:27 is one of those passages. Jesus said about his appearance on the Last Day: “As lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” The thrust of Jesus’ words is that his visible return on the Last Day will be evident to all at once—like a flash of lightning. Other Bible passages with an eastward orientation include Genesis 2:8; Isaiah 63:1; Ezekiel 43:1,2; and, Zechariah 14:4.

A fascinating and unusual variation is that sometimes pastors were buried facing west. Why the difference? The thinking was that the resurrected pastors would be in a position, literally, to minister to people around them.

Christians have used the Bible passages cited—and others—for guidance in serving the dead and the living. The thought that the Lord will return visibly from the east led to church floor plans that positioned individuals, standing or sitting, facing eastward when they worshiped. The rising sun that lit up the stained glass windows before their eyes reminded worshipers of the returning Son.

ISING TO A DIVISION

Rather than emphasizing which direction will be the starting point of the Lord’s return on the Last Day, the Bible points our attention to the division of humanity that will take place on that day. Jesus said, “A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—

those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28,29).

At death, when body and soul separate, judgment takes place, and souls go immediately to heaven or hell (Hebrews 9:27). On the Last Day, God will raise the bodies of all people and reunite bodies and souls. There will be a public proclamation of the private judgment that took place at people’s deaths, as well as a judgment of those who are alive on the earth on the Last Day (Matthew 25:31-46). Those with saving faith, evidenced by “doing good,” will “rise to live.” Those without saving faith, shown by “doing evil,” will “rise to be condemned.” The dead will be raised to go, body and soul, in different directions: to heaven or hell.

A few years ago, I stood in Kensal Green Cemetery in London, England, marveling at a mausoleum. While the crypt had an aged and weathered look about it, the confident claim atop one of the walls was still very much legible: “I shall arise.” That statement applies to everyone who dies. God will raise all the dead on the Last Day. There is no question about that. The only questions are what will happen after that and where people—body and soul—will spend eternity. As Christians, what a blessing to know and believe God’s promise that we will “rise to live.”

Contributing editor James Pope, professor at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minnesota, is a member at St. John, New Ulm.

James Pope also answers questions online at wels.net/questions. Submit your questions there or to fic@wels.net.

Your word
is a lamp
for my feet,
a light on
my path.

Psalm 119:105

The Common Doxology is familiar to most of us. We sing it often because our hearts are thankful for God's blessings.

Daniel G. Baumler

At the end of the Bible study, the pastor suggests, "Let's close by singing the Doxology." How many of you are humming it already?

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above, ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
(*Christian Worship* 334)

In Christian circles it's considered to be one of the world's most famous hymns. Many of you know it by heart. Some of you instantly break out into four-part harmony when you sing it. You've likely sung it more than any other hymn in your life. Why? Because God is worthy of such praise.

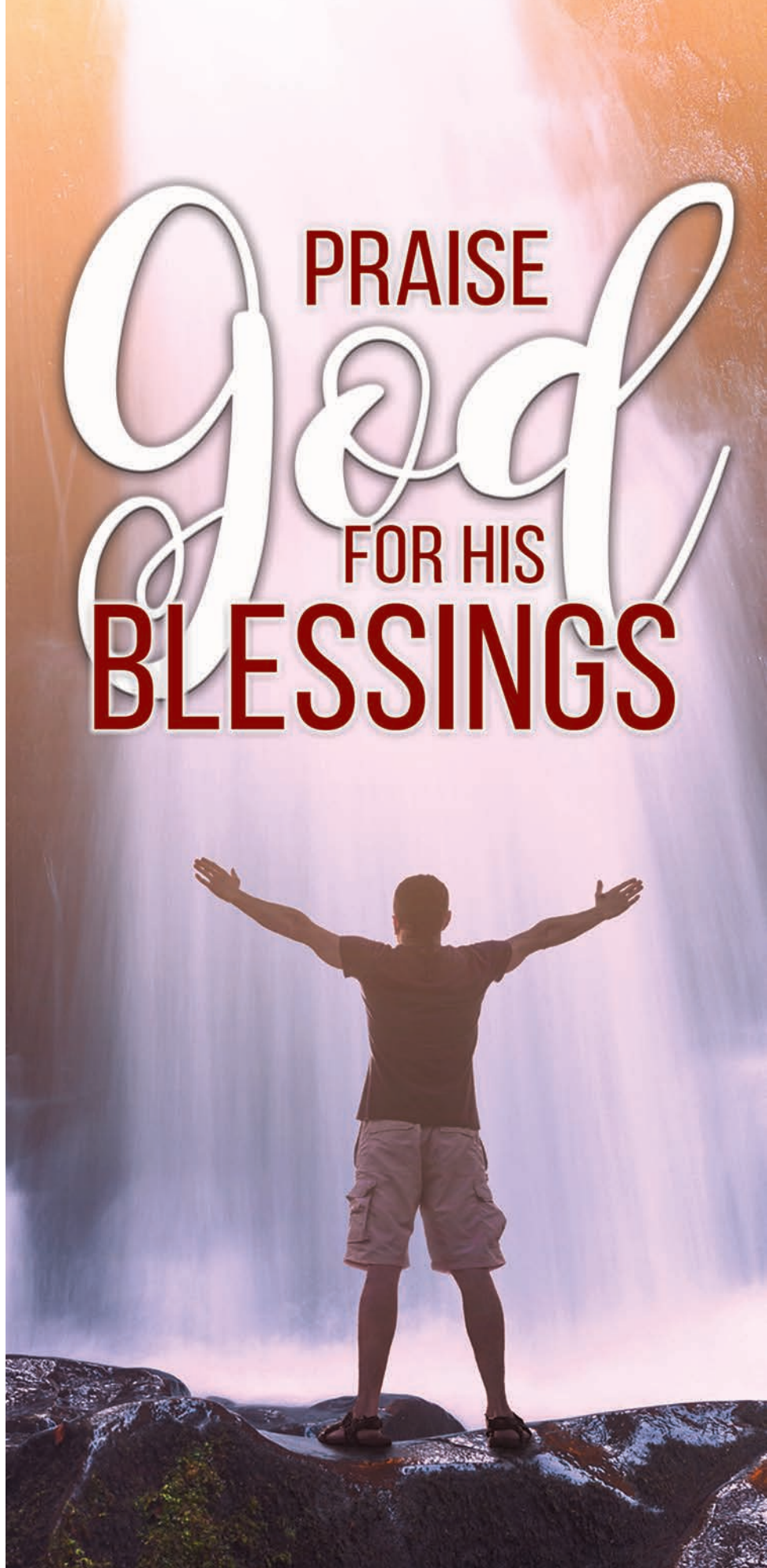
It's not an overstatement to say that we owe everything to our true and triune God. We owe our existence to him. We owe our salvation to him. We owe our faith to him. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost indeed!

Look at the hymn again. As you consider your great and gracious God and all the blessings that come from him, have you ever pondered *the flow* of those blessings?

THE FLOW OF BLESSINGS BEHIND A PEPPERONI PIZZA

Consider a pepperoni pizza. I know it's a strange illustration for Thanksgiving. We think of turkey with all the trimmings, but just follow the flow. Consider what goes into one pepperoni pizza and all the people involved. First to come to mind is the tomato farmer who grows the tomatoes for the tomato sauce. Then think of the crust and the wheat farmer who grows the wheat for the pizza dough. Cheese? Yes, the dairy farmer provides the milk for the cheese. What about the pig

PRAISE God FOR HIS BLESSINGS



farmer who provides the meat for the pepperoni? Some like bland pizza, but others want a little spice. The savory taste to the sauce and the pepperoni comes from the herbs and spices another farmer provides. Your takeout pizza comes in a box. The tree farmer provides the material for that cardboard box. Are you overcome by the flow yet?

We can go on and consider the factories, the distribution centers, the delivery trucks, the local pizza restaurant, and all the workers behind each and every one of these steps. Think of all that flows into those things just to have your pepperoni pizza. We haven't even begun to talk about the flow of weather the farmer needs for you to enjoy your pizza. Yet you can go to Little Caesar's, and your \$6 Hot-N-Ready is right there to purchase. Every time, it's right there.

Now consider your favorite grocery store or your favorite restaurant. Walk into your pantry. Open your fridge. There it is. The flow of blessings is everywhere! It's mind-boggling to ponder all that goes into just one pizza. It's absolutely overwhelming to think of the billions of mouths that are fed every day with a variety of food beyond pizza. More than anything, it's humbling, because we are so undeserving.

THE FLOW OF BLESSINGS IN THE DESERT

Before the Israelites came to the land flowing with milk and honey, blessings from God flowed to them in the desert. Every morning, other than the Sabbath, manna was there. In the evenings, the wind brought quail. When water was scarce, it flowed from a rock. The Israelites were never without.

Yet in spite of the flow, God's people had the audacity to whine and complain. "They spoke against God and against Moses, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!'" (Numbers 21:5). What? They did have bread, the manna, every day. They did have water, from a rock, on more than one

occasion. No wonder then that "the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died" (Numbers 21:6).

How easy it is to feel all self-righteous and think the people of Israel got what they deserved. You wouldn't whine and complain like that, would you?

Consider the blessings that flow every time we go to church. Isn't the greater wonder the inexhaustible flow of grace from Christ when we worship?

Would you? While the blessings flow, how many of us grouse because we don't know what to eat for supper? It always seems to be the same grub. While the blessings flow, how many of us can't believe the store is out of the item we wanted? How dare they! We ask, "Where's the manager?" While the blessings flow, how many of us get on the phone to put the customer service rep in his place because someone processed our order wrong? Never mind letting our light shine or being the salt of the earth. Someone's got to know how angry we are.

Honestly, venomous snakes don't seem enough punishment for our ridiculous whining and complaining. Paul knew what he was saying in Ephesians when he observed, "We were by nature deserving of wrath" (2:3).

THE FLOW OF BLESSINGS FROM OUR SAVIOR

But that venomous snake story did not end with just a bunch of dead whiners. Something else flowed that day, greater than any manna or quail or water. Grace, mercy, and forgiveness flowed. The people of Israel

repented. "The LORD said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.' So, Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived" (Numbers 21:8,9).

How many times have you heard it flow from God's heart through the pastor's lips: "Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in abundance from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"? Those blessings flow because "just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man *must be* lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14,15). Immediately after those two verses flows John 3:16. You know it as well as the Common Doxology, right?

Set the pepperoni pizza aside and consider the blessings that flow every time we go to church. Isn't the greater wonder the inexhaustible flow of grace from Christ when we worship? Ponder that flow for a moment. When we confess our sins, absolution for those sins freely flows. We hear the saving news of Christ crucified and Christ risen, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding freely flows. We come forward to receive the body and blood of our Savior together with the bread and the wine, and forgiveness freely flows. Notice the emphasis on *freely*? Through faith in Jesus, all these blessings are ours. Every time we come, every time we repent, every time we hear, every time we receive, those blessings are there. God's saving love is there. Not one of us is ever without.

If you think about the flow of blessings, you can understand why the cornucopia is a symbol or picture of Thanksgiving. There is also a reason the cross stands on or above our altars. The flow is always there.

Sing it: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Daniel Baumler is pastor at Christ Our Redeemer, El Paso, Texas.



EVANGELISM

lessons from the Savior

The man who walked away.

James F. Borgwardt

Imagine this scenario. You've been planning to invite your neighbor Dave to an upcoming service at your church. He's gone through some dark times recently, and you know it's time that you finally work up the nerve to ask him. It's a Saturday morning, and you see that he's out working in his yard.

You've rehearsed different ways the conversation might go. Something like: "Dave, do you have any plans for Christmas Eve? If not, we'd love for you to join us for candlelight worship at Redeemer. It's one of our favorite services of the year. It's a beautiful service that tells how God brought light into this dark world when Jesus was born. I think you'd enjoy it."

You say a quick prayer and walk over to your neighbor. The conversation begins with some natural small talk before you transition into the invitation.

Dave pauses. He hadn't expected this from you. When he does speak, his disjointed thoughts meander back to his experience in the church he last attended as a teenager.

He didn't have many fond memories. You acknowledge that your church isn't perfect either, but the messages you

hear and the friendships you've found there have been a great blessing.

He politely ends the conversation by stating that he's not very religious and then adds that he needs to finish some work before the football game starts. Before you can reply, he walks away.

WITNESSING GOALS

Was that a failed witness?

I suppose that depends on how you understand your witnessing goals. If the goal for your witness is to bring an unbeliever to saving faith in Christ, then get ready for endless failure. You'll never accomplish your goal. Ever. You cannot change a person's heart. That task is reserved for someone far more powerful—God the Holy Spirit.

If the goal for your dialogue is to prove the truth of the Bible, you may win some arguments. But the poor soul that you embarrassed with your superior debating skills may still turn away. You could win the argument and lose a soul.

Jesus never sent us into the world with the words, "You will be my lawyers." Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).

When you have another opportunity to witness, make sure you are clear that your goal is not to convert anyone. It's not even to convince anyone. It's simply to converse with them—to talk with them about your gracious God.

And if someone walks away from you, don't get down. It wasn't a failure. After all, people walked away from Jesus too. And Jesus was not a failure.

TWO EXAMPLES FROM JESUS

People responded in all sorts of ways to the Savior's witness. Sure, some came to saving faith that very day, like the Samaritan woman at the well, the tax collector Zacchaeus, and even the criminal on the cross.

But not everyone was converted on the spot. Consider Nicodemus in John chapter 3.

In this profound nighttime conversation, the Pharisee was the first to hear the beautiful gospel summary of John 3:16. How did he respond to Jesus? We don't know. John doesn't record the man's reaction. John simply leaves Nicodemus in the darkness as the gospel account moves forward.

But if we're patient and keep reading, we see clear evidence of saving faith many months later. When the beaten body of Jesus hung from the cross outside of Jerusalem, Nicodemus must have watched the events all unfold. No doubt he recalled Jesus' words from that private conversation: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14,15).

John reveals Nicodemus as the believer who stepped out of the shadows, lowered Jesus' lifeless body to the ground, and helped lay him in the tomb. I love how John tells us the rest of the story with Nicodemus.

In Matthew chapter 19, there was another man who, like Nicodemus, enjoyed a life of privilege in Jewish society. And like Nicodemus, Jesus lovingly engaged him in a conversation about eternal life. But unlike Nicodemus' story, we only hear of this man's initial conversation with Jesus. Without a name given, he is often referred to by Matthew's description as the rich young man.

The account of Jesus' conversation with this man teaches us lessons in evangelism that we'll study the next couple of months. For now, we'll begin with the ending. Jesus' last words to him were an invitation: "Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad" (Matthew 19:21,22).

The man walked away.

We don't hear about him again. He walked away and may well have stayed away. Jesus told us in a dozen different ways that this will happen for many people who will listen to our witness of Christ and will ultimately reject him and remain lost.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Yet there will be plenty of others who may walk away at first, but—like Nicodemus—will have a "rest of the story."

Allow me to share one of those stories.

J. T. was a man who had some Christian background from childhood, but he hadn't been to worship in many years. In his young adult life, he even developed a strong aversion to preachers and the church. He once told his wife he wouldn't

give them the time of day. Yet on a sweltering night in Georgia in July, he answered a knock at the door. The young pastor on the doorstep had just been ordained the week before and was meeting the neighbors in his early efforts to establish a new Lutheran church.

When something like this happened in the past, J. T. would quickly close the door and walk away. That's what his wife, Paige, expected him to do

on this occasion. Instead, he listened. More than that, he invited the stranger inside. A few months later, J. T. and Paige finished our mission congregation's first adult instruction class and Paige was baptized.

Paige and I both found out why J. T. was willing to listen to me that night. During his last military deployment in Europe, he had hit a noticeable rough patch. A caring chaplain approached him and sat down with him. That Christian man shared compassion and God's Word with J. T. at a time he needed both. Afterward, J. T. told himself that the next time he came across a preacher, he would handle it differently. He would listen to the next pastor who wanted to speak with him. The next evangelist just happened to be me.

Only God knows where he may put us in a line of witnesses on someone else's path. So be ready with your witness. And be ready for some to walk away. If it happened to Jesus, it'll happen to you. But also pray that another Christian down the road will witness again.

Not all who walk away will stay away.

James Borgwardt is pastor at Redeemer, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

This is the first article in a three-part series on evangelism lessons from the account of the rich young man in Matthew chapter 19.

A man learns that salvation is easy because Jesus has done it all, but that it cost Jesus, the Son of God, his holy, precious blood.

Wade R. Johnston

"That's too easy." That was a refrain throughout my instruction in the Lutheran faith.

I'd been kicked out of the group class. I think Pastor Karl Vertz could tell I might take a little longer and need more back-and-forth. Those who know me can understand.

I will be forever thankful for that class. And, yet, as I studied and went through it, *That's too easy* was a thought that often came to mind, if not out of my mouth.

MY CATHOLIC UPBRINGING

I was raised in a good Christian home. If you'd have asked me when I was younger if I were a Christian, I probably would have said, "No, I'm Catholic," but that would have been ignorance, not truth. I know the Roman Catholic Church in America has had its scandals, with shocking revelations coming from Pennsylvania as I write, but I had good priests. Fr. John and Fr.

Joe were faithful, at least so far as I experienced.

I was an altar boy, and I enjoyed it. It was fun being a part of the conduct of the Mass, and it drew me deeper into what the Roman Catholic Church believed and what life and death in it looked like. I was often dismissed from school to serve for a funeral. I learned the hard way not to let the incense burn me. I served for weddings when asked. I came to know the holy days and why they mattered. And, I can say, I'm glad for it. God fed me, even if the fare wasn't as rich as what I'd later be served. And God prepared me; I was being readied for the message of unconditional grace.

I went to parochial school until eighth grade: St. Robert Bellarmine, named after a Jesuit theologian known for his opposition to Lutheranism. My parents sacrificed for me to have the opportunity to study there. I had good teachers. I made great friends. When I was young, Bishop Moses Anderson, the first black bishop in the Archdiocese of Detroit, put his cap on me and told my family I'd be a priest someday. I have the picture to prove it.

I went to a large public high school, once again, a good school. I was able to take a lot of advanced placement classes and other courses that chal-

lenged me to read. I really enjoyed reading about religion and religions. Later in high school I got a job dispatching semis on the weekend. I had a huge cell phone (this was well before iPhones). It made going to church not the easiest, but my parents rightly expected me to make church a priority.

MY INTRODUCTION TO LUTHERANISM

Here perhaps a tangent might be helpful. My mother had been raised Lutheran. She never officially became Roman Catholic. My grandparents on her side were still Lutheran, although I didn't know much about what Lutherans were, what they believed, and what their churches were like. As I got older, I started to learn more.

I don't remember how I ended up going to Peace Lutheran in Livonia, Mich., for sure, but I'm guessing my mom or Grandma suggested it. Pastor Vertz didn't mind if I brought my dispatching stuff. I also was intrigued. Peace had a nice area behind the sanctuary where I could sit and not disturb the service if I had to cut out to take a call. Those two things kept me coming back and led to me taking a class.

I would love to say I took quickly to Lutheranism, but that wouldn't be true. I resolved to do a thorough in-



Confessions OF FAITH

vestigation. I had a notebook and drew two columns on page after page. I read church history and wrote notes in the “RC” and the “Luth” columns. I read the Bible and did the same. The book of Romans, which I now teach, was a mess of highlighting in that Bible. When all was said and done, I had some real thinking to do.

My parents were amazingly understanding and patient. They were supportive of whatever I decided—whether it was remaining in the Roman Catholic Church or joining the Lutheran church. My maternal grandparents were happy but never pushed me. I grew a lot closer to Grandpa Pitts during this time. He was sick with cancer but clearly excited to see me taking such an interest in the classes. He died Dec. 21, 1995. It was the first deathbed of many at which I’d held a hand and prayed the Lord’s Prayer. I was confirmed Dec. 31, 1995. I never got to commune with him, but I rejoice to know that we are of the same communion of saints and that I share the same confidence he had in a righteousness that was not his own, but freely declared his own in Christ. I still have his Bible, also marked up.

MY ALLEGIANCE TO CHRIST

Why did I become Lutheran? When I honestly examined myself, when I

thought long and hard about what the Bible, Pastor Vertz, and human experience teach about human nature after the fall, I couldn’t get around the fact that salvation was beyond my reach. We are beggars, not negotiators, before God. When sin sank in, grace made sense. I appreciated the fact that the Lutheran church was plain on the law where the Bible gave law, but refused to come up with its own excuses or laws—whether to ease up God’s demands or to exaggerate them. I was comforted by the fact that the church doesn’t have spiritual classes, that one need not forsake the world to serve God, but rather God uses us when and where he places us in the world. I came to realize that justification by grace through faith isn’t too easy at all. It came at the price of God’s own blood. It involves our own death and resurrection, as the law does its work, accusing and killing, and as the Spirit does his, raising and renewing through the gospel.

I found it freeing to know that true Lutheranism calls us to allegiance not to an institution or to the decrees and statements of men, well-intentioned and sound as they may be or have been for their time, but to Christ himself, who is our hope and song and sermon.

I’ve had my ups and downs, for sure, and Jesus and I have had our moments.



Wade Johnston

At the end of the day, though, I find that my ministry and I both have been served best when what brought me into Lutheranism puts me in my place again—when God in his grace strips me of my pride and self-delusion and leaves me only Christ to lean on and proclaim. My hope and prayer are that the same is true for all of us and that the same will be true for the Lutheran church as well as we press forward in a world that needs nothing more and nothing less than the same Jesus Christ.

Wade Johnston, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a member at Nain, West Allis, Wisconsin.



heart to heart parent conversations

This month Rob Guenther writes about one of parenting's essential questions—at least for those of us with boys. How can we help our sons grow into godly men?

Guenther wrestled with this question and came up with a plan to help prepare his son for manhood. Read on to see what the “Man-Up Challenge” was all about, how you can adapt the challenge for your family, and how it really applies to all Christians.

Do you have advice to share? We'd love to hear from you! Share your perspectives on being a godly man—or woman.

Nicole Balza

Join the conversation!

Visit wels.net/forwardinchrist
and look for the
Heart to heart link.

HOW CAN I HELP MY SON GROW INTO A GODLY MAN?

“What does it mean to be a man?” That question ran through my mind as I considered that this might be my last year to have much influence on my oldest son, Josiah. Living in Alaska, my wife and I planned to send Josiah to Luther Preparatory School in Watertown, Wis., for high school. And that meant that his eighth-grade year was his last year at home. So, here's what I proposed to Josiah: “Let's challenge each other to ‘man up’ in three areas of life. To show our thanks to Jesus, let's grow stronger physically, mentally, and especially spiritually so that, with our strength, we can help others.”

That became the beginning of the “Man-Up Challenge” for Josiah and me. So, what did the “Man-Up Challenge” look like? We discussed it and agreed that we would take Saturdays and Sundays off (or use them to “catch up” where we fell behind), but each weekday we would do push-ups (starting with doing one on the first day of school, two on the second day, etc., until we reached one hundred push-ups per day), read a few pages of a book that would help us become lifelong learners (hoping to work through one book a month for ten months), and read a chapter of our Bibles (it just so happens that there are 260 chapters in the New Testament and almost exactly the same number of weekdays in a year). We printed out monthly charts that we could check off when we met the challenge for the day. And we left Saturday and Sunday to make up what we missed.

At the start of the school year, we both struggled with 20 push-ups. At the end of the school year, we could consistently do 100 push-ups (sets of 25 four times a day), felt leaner and stronger, had some great discussions on what it means to be a godly man (looking for that theme in the books we read and especially in the New Testament), and grew in our relationship and in our faith.

I asked Josiah what he learned over the course of the year and wasn't surprised to hear him say, “I learned it was tough to keep our commitment. And I learned it was way easier when you pushed me to do it.” That's what I learned too.

Lesson #1: We need one another. “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10).

There were many days that I really didn't feel like doing any more push-ups. But I knew that as soon as he got home from school, Josiah was sure to ask, “How many push-ups have you done so far today, Dad?” And I did not want to let him down by saying, “Zero.” So I got to it and did a set or two. Likewise, there were plenty of days that Josiah didn't want to read a chapter of a book on church history I had chosen. But he knew I was going to nag . . . er . . . *encourage* him when I found out he had

skipped two days in a row. We had to encourage each other along the way.

And that's not just true of a "Man-Up Challenge." It's true in life. There are times that I need a brother in the faith to pull me aside and lovingly rebuke me and offer a word of encouragement. It is so hard to preach the law to yourself, perhaps even more difficult to preach the gospel to yourself. We need one another. We need to cultivate close friendships with other Christians who will hold us accountable, lovingly tell us when we're doing something stupid, or encourage us to keep going when we're ready to give up.

Lesson #2: We need more than one another. "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24,25).

As we made our challenge known to other men in the congregation, they too would hold us accountable in their own way. They wouldn't nag us but would occasionally ask, "How's the challenge going?" or "How many push-ups are you up to today?" or "How far into the New Testament have you made it?" This not only encouraged us to keep going, but it also encouraged them. Some joined us in reading their Bibles. Others tried the push-ups themselves. It became a bit contagious.

But then some of the men of the congregation got involved directly in our challenge. "Your son needs to learn how to change the oil in a car. I know you can't do that, Pastor. So come over on Saturday. I'll show you both how." "I'll teach you how to operate a chainsaw, Pastor, so you can teach your boys." It takes a village to raise a child. And I am very thankful for the godly men in our church who taught my boys some life skills, but even more so, who modeled a humble and quiet confidence in God's promises and a willingness to serve others in thanks.

And this is true not just in a "Man-Up Challenge" but also in life. God puts us together in communities, in the body of believers, where some are gifted with some skills and others have gifts in different areas. We all need one another. And what better place to find that community than in the church. Of course we need to go to church to hear the Word and receive the Sacrament. But we also need it to spur one another on and to encourage one another in our faith and in our life.

Lesson #3: We need forgiveness. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

We didn't always do well. A day off of school, a busy week in Lent, or a week of tests would break the routine, and no push-ups or reading would be done. When we fell too far behind to catch up (four hundred push-ups is a lot to do on a Sunday afternoon!), we would declare a "Day of Jubilee" where all debts were canceled. We'd do a "reset" and start over on Monday, forgiving all the times we missed.

We didn't do the "Man-Up Challenge" perfectly, but when we failed, we owned it, we gave and received forgiveness, and we started all over again. And each time we reset, we did a little bit better than we did the last time. While it was not a perfect run, we are both better—stronger mentally, physically, and spiritually—having made the attempt.

Of course, this too is a lesson for life. We need forgiveness. Often. We need a regular reminder of what our Savior has done to win that forgiveness. But that forgiveness isn't a license to wallow in our sin. It frees us to get back up and try again . . . and again . . . and again. And when we mess up—and we will—we go back to the cross to find forgiveness and the strength to give forgiveness. And that forgiveness drives us to try again to live for him with all that we are—body, mind, and spirit.

Lesson #4: Celebrate the success! "The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great" (Nehemiah 8:17).

When the challenge was over, Josiah and I hiked to the top of a mountain. At the top, even though we were already tired from the hike, we "manned up" and each did one hundred more push-ups. We talked about the lessons that we learned during the "Man-Up Challenge," the things we wanted to continue, the things we'd try to do better.

At the top of the mountain, I then presented him with a set of printed "dog tags" that reminded him that he would always be loved—by me, but more important, by God. I gave him a copy of a book that I'd been editing during that year—a book written by the godly men in his life, including church members, uncles and grandparents, teachers, and strangers whom he'd never met but who helped me to "man up." They all shared their thoughts on what it means to be a Christian man and gave their advice to Josiah.

We descended the mountain and continued the conversation over lunch to conclude our celebration. And with a sense of accomplishment, we gave thanks to God for helping us grow as men.

We still have a lot of manning up to do—both of us. But we're on the right track. And with God's help, we'll continue to grow stronger—mentally, physically, and spiritually—that we might better help others in thanks to God for all he's done for us.

Rob Guenther and his wife, Becky, are raising four boys. They recently moved from Kenai, Alaska, to New Ulm, Minnesota.

To read a compilation of the advice Guenther received for his son, check out *Man Up, Josiah! Advice on Being a Godly Man* at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



One of the other nine

For what are you thankful? In every blessing, every gift, every challenge, every crisis—you can thank God for his love in Jesus.

Jonathan P. Bilitz

You don't know my name. You may have read a little about me and probably have a bad impression of me. I don't blame you. I am a small part of a famous Bible story.

Do you remember the story of the ten lepers? You know, the one where only the Samaritan returned to thank Jesus? That's my story. I was one who did not return. I was one about whom Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" (Luke 17:17). There are no excuses for what I did—or better, for what I didn't do. I simply pray you learn from my failure.

I was dead. Or at least in the hearts of those who knew me, in the minds of everyone else, I was as good as dead. Death is the sentence of leprosy. I was living apart from the people I loved, living with others who were afflicted like me. No healthy person wanted to come near me. Worst of all, leprosy had no cure. I was dead.

Can you imagine my anticipation when I heard that the great healer, Jesus, was going to be near? You can undoubtedly picture my joy as my body became whole on my way to the priests. Maybe you wonder, *What was he thinking? How could he neglect to give Jesus a simple word of thanks?*

I have no excuse. I was thinking only of myself. I thought about what I was going to do with my new lease on life. How wonderful it was to be healed! Worse than my selfishness, I had no appreciation for the real Jesus. I have replayed that day in my mind many times. Oh, for a second chance!

That's why I am writing this letter. Time passed before I understood how wrongly I had acted. Then I heard news about the teacher who healed me. Jesus' tragic death saddened me deeply. I heard stories about his resurrection. But that's exactly what I considered them—stories.

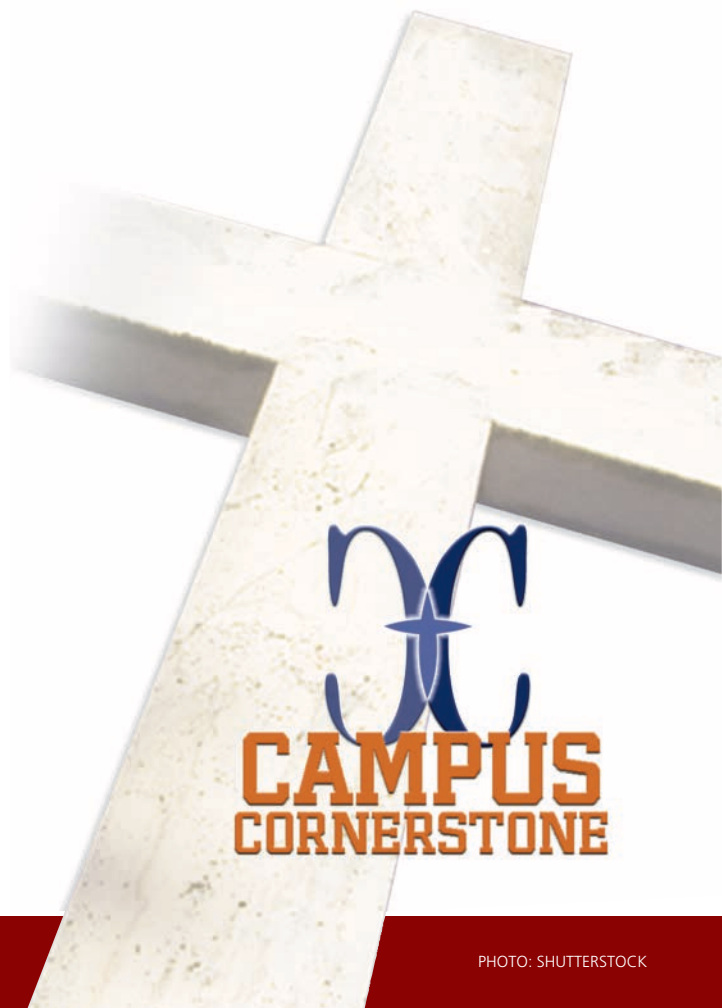
But something changed. As I looked at my life, I felt something missing. I thought I was happy. After all, the death sentence leprosy had pronounced had been miraculously lifted. Yet something wasn't right.

I began to learn more about my healer, and my eyes were opened. The Spirit of God used Jesus' life, his death, *and* his resurrection to reveal he is more than just a healer and teacher. Jesus is the Messiah about whom the Old Testament prophesied. He is the Great Prophet about whom Moses spoke. He is the Lamb led to the slaughter that Isaiah presented. Jesus is my Savior, but not only from leprosy. He is my Savior from sin and death itself!

Suddenly, the guilt of my thanklessness seemed even greater. I had offended God himself! Then I saw that Jesus' life and death were for me. Jesus lived perfectly when I could not. He suffered the punishment that should have been mine. My sin and my guilt were completely gone—just as my leprosy had been taken away! I am at peace with God.

My joy overflows into words and actions with only one purpose—to praise and glorify the Savior who loves me so much he healed me *twice*.

Jon Bilitz is campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wisconsin.



CHANGES IN MINISTRY

Pastors

Bergemann, Jonathan, to Good Shepherd, Downers Grove, Ill.

Buchner, Nathaniel, to Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.

Killinger, Michael, to Bethel, Bay City, Mich.

Kriewall, Earl, to Our Savior, Arlington, Texas

Naumann, Paul, to retirement

Nelson, Marques, to St. Paul, North Mankato, Minn.

Pappenfuss, Samuel, to St. Paul, Crandon, Wis.

Raasch Sr., John, to Bethel, Menasha, Wis.

Schaefer, Benjamin, to Mt. Calvary, Redding, Calif.

Schumann, James, to Mt. Calvary, Menasha, Wis.

Voss, Joel A., to Emanuel First, Lansing, Mich.

Workentine, Benjamin, to St. Mark, De Pere, Wis.

Teachers

Bauer, Sara, to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.

Bitcon, Allison, to Apostles, San Jose, Calif.

Bohlmann, Rebekah, to Salem, Greenfield, Minn.

Hafner, Joanna, to Grace, Portland, Ore.

Kilchenmann, Karen, to Costa Maya Ministries

Knickelbein, Kristin, to St. Mark, Eau Claire, Wis.

Laska, Elizabeth, to Siloah, Milwaukee, Wis.

Mantzke, Karl, to St. John's, Sparta, Wis.

Martens, Linda, to retirement

Mateske, Adam, to Emanuel, New London, Wis.

Meitner, Merlin, to Cross of Glory, Peoria, Ariz.

Pahmeier, Fred, to St. Paul, Howards Grove, Wis.

Root, Cheryl, to Shepherd of the Valley, Menasha, Wis.

Schumacher, Carrie, to Garden Homes, Milwaukee, Wis.

Sordahl, Stacey, to Zion, Monroe, Mich.

Tonn, Sarah, to St. Paul, Muskego, Wis.

Staff ministers

Worden, Gerald, to Divine Word, Plover, Wis.

SYNOD CONVENTION

The 65th biennial convention of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod will be held July 29–Aug. 1, 2019, at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. The convention delegate fee, paid by the calling body the delegate represents, is \$275. The deadline for submitting memorials to be printed in the *Book of Reports and Memorials* is Jan.

15, 2019. Memorials submitted after Jan. 15 and approved for convention consideration will be posted on the convention website, wels.net/2019synodconvention, if they are received by June 15, 2019. Further directions can be found at wels.net/2019synodconvention. Send memorials to the President's Office, N16W23377 Stone Ridge Dr, Waukesha WI 53188; carla.martin@wels.net.

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The synod Nominating Committee will meet in January 2019 to propose three candidates for each of the following positions to be elected at the 2019 synod convention:

- WELS Board of Appeals: three members (one pastor, one male teacher or staff minister, one layman)
- WELS Board of Appeals: chairman (pastor)
- Northwestern Publishing House Board of Directors: three members (one parish pastor, one Martin Luther College professor, one layman)
- Luther Preparatory School Governing Board: chairman (parish pastor)
- Michigan Lutheran Seminary Governing Board: chairman (parish pastor)
- Board for Ministerial Education: two members (one male teacher or staff minister, one layman)
- Board for World Missions: three members (one pastor, one male teacher or staff minister, one layman)
- Commission on Worship: chairman (pastor, male teacher, male staff minister, or layman)
- Commission on Congregational Counseling: chairman (pastor, male teacher, male staff minister, or layman)
- Commission on Special Ministries: chairman (pastor, male teacher, male staff minister, or layman)
- Commission on Discipleship: chairman (pastor, male teacher, male staff minister, or layman)

All male called workers, congregations, and their male voting members through their congregations are authorized by the constitution to submit nominations by Nov. 30, 2018. Access position descriptions and the nomination form at wels.net/nomination-alert. The list of candidates will be posted online by May 15, 2019, at wels.net/nomination-alert. The delegates will elect one candidate for each position at the 2019 synod convention.

NOTICE FOR CONGREGATION TREASURERS AND PASTORS

We thank God for you and for your support of the ministry WELS carries out on behalf of all congregations. We ask that you continue to mail your Congregation Mission

Offering (CMO) deposit and its processing coupon to our bank lockbox, which provides effective and efficient deposit processing for the synod. For your CMO payment to be included in reported receipts for the month, it must be received in the synod's bank lockbox on or before the last business day. An exception is made for December offerings. Gifts received by the bank lockbox up to and including Jan. 8, 2019, will be credited as 2018 CMO, if accompanied by a 2018 coupon. Thank you for your assistance.

ANNIVERSARIES

South Windsor, Conn.—Messiah (50).

Nov. 4. Worship 9 A.M.; meal and program to follow. RSVP requested. pastor@melcct.necoxmail.com, 860-644-2110.

Strongsville, Ohio—Our Savior (40).

Nov. 4. Worship, 10:30 A.M.; catered dinner, noon. RSVP requested. 440-334-8721.

COMING EVENTS

WELS National Multi-Site conference—

Nov. 12–14. Ingleside Hotel and Conference Center, Pewaukee, Wis. Website, wels.net/multi-site-2018.

Concert—Nov. 25. 2 & 4:30 P.M. The Lutheran Chorale of Milwaukee. Abiding Word, Milwaukee, Wis. Theme, "Prelude to Christmas." Website, lutheranchorage.org.

Live nativity—Dec. 1. Martin Luther, Oshkosh, Wis.

Live nativity—Dec. 7–8. 6–8 P.M. Christ, Eagle River, Wis. Hosted by Christ, Eagle River, and St. John, Phelps, Wis. Presentations run every 20 minutes. 715-479-8307.

WELS ministerial education school Christmas concerts—

- Dec. 1, 7:30 P.M.; Dec. 2, 4 P.M. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. 507-354-8221.
- Dec. 9, 3 and 7 P.M. Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis. 262-242-8100.
- Dec. 16, 3 P.M.; Dec. 20, 10 A.M. Luther Preparatory School, Watertown, Wis. 920-261-4352.
- Dec. 21, 7 P.M. Michigan Lutheran Seminary, Saginaw, Mich. 989-793-1041.

SERVICE TIMES

Gulf Shores, Ala.—Risen Savior, Navarre, Fla., will hold church services for Gulf Shores area WELS/ELS snowbirds at 4 P.M., Jan. 6 and 20 and Feb. 3 and 17 at St. Jude By the Sea Lutheran Church, 312 E 16 Ave, Gulf Shores. Bible class will follow. Evan Dobberfuhl, 715-573-0808; tpcevan@gmail.com.

Find additional community events and resources at welsrc.net. To place an announcement, call 414-256-3210; bulletinboard@wels.net. Deadline is eight weeks before publication date.



SHORT-TERM MISSION TRIPS THAT INSPIRE A LIFELONG JOURNEY OF SERVICE AND OUTREACH.

SAN CARLOS RESERVATION, ARIZONA

This past September, four members of Pilgrim, Minneapolis, Minn., and one member of St. John, Minneapolis, Minn., spent a week on the San Carlos Reservation in Arizona to pass out invitations to the Apache mission's 125th anniversary, to help clean up the church and school campus in Peridot in preparation for the October celebration, and to organize promotional items for the event. They also spent time sharing ministry ideas and encouragement with local Apache church members. "How different the people are who receive the gospel but how the gospel that we all receive isn't different at all!" says Paula Schmeling, one of the participants. "We were immersed with adults and children who were a different skin color, some who were at a different poverty level, some who were experiencing different health issues and education levels, but we all held hands in church on Sunday and heard the Lord's beautiful message of sin and grace! This was the same message shared 125 years ago when the Lutheran church began on the Apache Reservation! God's love endures forever!"

Learn more about Mission Journeys and how you can be involved at wels.net/missionjourneys.



Obituaries

John P. Brandt, 1931–2018

John Brandt was born July 12, 1931, in Appleton, Wis. He died May 21, 2018, in New London, Wis.

A 1957 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served St. Paul, Faith, S.D.; First English, Dupree, S.D.; Trinity, Clear Lake, S.D.; Zion, Fremont, Wis.; St. Peter's, Larsen, Wis.; Immanuel, Black Creek, Wis.; and St. Matthew, Appleton, Wis.

He is survived by his wife, Barbara; 2 sons; 3 daughters; 15 grandchildren; 15 great-grandchildren; and 1 sister. He is preceded in death by one son and one brother.

Mervin J. Ingebritson, 1918–2018

Mervin Ingebritson was born Apr. 4, 1918, in Randall, Iowa. He died May 21, 2018, in New Ulm, Minn.

A 1940 graduate of Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn., he taught at Good Shepherd, Omaha, Neb.; Wisconsin Lutheran High School, Milwaukee, Wis.; and Dr. Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.

He is preceded in death by his wife, Lorraine; two sisters; and one brother.

Herbert A. Birner, 1916–2018

Herbert Birner was born Jan. 20, 1916, in Mena, Ark. He died May 22, 2018, in Indian River, Mich.

A 1941 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., he served Mt. Calvary, Estelline, S.D.; Zion, Mobridge, S.D.; and Good Shepherd, Burton, Mich.

He is survived by his wife, Garnet; 5 sons; 11 grandchildren; and 4 great-grandchildren. He is preceded in death by six siblings.

Note: *Forward in Christ* includes obituaries for deaths reported in the synod's call report. From now on, the call report will only be reporting deaths of called workers who are actively serving at the time of their death or for those who have retired from active ministry. This reflects the current Yearbook policy set by the Conference of Presidents.

for the Generations to come

CONGREGATIONAL PLANNING PROVIDES DIRECTION

September was a big month for Trinity, Waukesha, Wis. Not only did its school start its first year as a Wisconsin Parental Choice school so it could provide Christian education to low-income families in the congregation and community, but it also found out that a bilingual pastor had accepted the church's call to minister to Hispanic families in the neighborhood.

This didn't happen overnight. It was the result of God's grace—and significant self-assessment and years of planning.

"You take a solid look at your ministry; you listen carefully to what people are saying; and you open your eyes and take a good look around," says Aaron Christie, pastor at Trinity. "Then you make some ministry decisions and put down some good plans. Will all these things happen exactly as you plan? Likely not. But can significant things happen in a timely manner? Absolutely!"

The process started about four years ago when Trinity put together a five-year planning committee. Their plans were put on hold, however, when major church repairs were needed. When the church began to revisit the plans, it decided to use a synod program called Self-Assessment and Adjustment. Developed by the Commission on Congregational Counseling (CCC), this program helps congregations assess their current ministry and provides ideas and strategies for congregations to adjust their ministry as needed.

The first step was Trinity putting together congregational and community profiles as well as surveying its members about their views on the church and its ministry.

Further assessment continued when a CCC counselor spent a day leading 50

congregational leaders in a Bible study about what Scripture says about various areas of ministry. After this study, attendees broke out into small groups and talked about how the congregation was doing in these areas and what could be improved. The counselor then compiled a report of the key findings, listing ideas that the congregation could implement and resources that could help them.

"You can get so focused on the everyday running of ministry that you don't always see things that are right in front of your face, let alone the big-picture items," says Christie about the 1,450-member congregation and its ministry. "It was good to have Christian, cordial, and meaningful conversation about how we can serve the Lord of the church best with the people and the abilities that God has given us."

Among other things, Trinity determined that it wanted to increase its effort in reaching out in its Hispanic neighborhood. It began offering English as a Second Lan-



More than 40 people attend Trinity's English as a Second Language classes and the congregation has conducted several baptisms since Spanish-speaking students from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary started helping the congregation reach out to its Hispanic neighbors.

guage classes and quarterly Spanish-language worship services. By winter 2017, the congregation had 40 people in ESL classes. It also spent the year registering its school for the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program. Then in April 2018, Trinity received an enhancement grant from the Board for Home Missions so it could call a full-time bilingual pastor. Now with eight Choice students at its school and a new Spanish-speaking pastor coming, Trinity can move on to its next step to spread the gospel in its community. Each reached goal brings Trinity closer to its vision of becoming a church that is able to reach out not only in English across Waukesha but also in Spanish across the street.

Jon Hein, CCC director, says that this type of long-range strategic planning can be transformational for congregations. "The proclamation of the gospel never changes, but how we carry it out might need to be adjusted, depending on our resources and what our community is like," he says. "Strategic planning is assessing the current reality in your congregation and community, envisioning a desired future, and establishing goals that move you from that current reality to the desired future. Once you have that vision, it allows you to make bolder moves in your ministry."

Learn more about the CCC at wels.net/ccs.

OPPORTUNITY

Besides offering counseling to individual congregations, the Commission on Congregational Counseling (CCC) offers a weekend-long School of Strategic Planning for groups of congregations that want to improve their short- and long-term planning. Aspects of this program now will be offered online. Congregations can go through modules that discuss creating a mission statement, clarifying core values, setting goals, and developing a long-range plan.

The first modules are available at welscongregationalservices.net.

A special day of baptisms

"We call this "special ministry," but it's really just plain ministry. It is God's people using God's Word to carry out the mission Jesus has given us. Because Jesus cares for us, we care for others by proclaiming Jesus our Savior," says Matt Brown, pastor at Abiding Word, Houston, Texas, when reflecting on the baptisms of a special family.

Sharon has adopted 11 children, all with a range of special needs. Her life is hectic, but full of love. Through the Jesus Cares program at Abiding Word, the Holy Spirit also filled her home with Jesus' love.

Sharon is not a confirmed member of the congregation, but she's been taking her kids, as the family is able, to the Jesus Cares program for a few years. More recently, members of the congregation have been making it easier for the family by visiting their house to provide Bible instruction.

This past spring, Sharon asked if her children could be baptized—all 11 of them, plus one grandchild. One of the aid workers who helps with the children's medical needs also heard the saving message of the gospel and asked if she could be baptized too.

On May 5, eight members of the family were baptized at the Saturday Jesus Cares service at Abiding Word. Then, because some of the children were unable to come due to health limitations,

a group of members went to the family's home to witness five more souls receive the washing and rebirth of baptism. These special children were not only adopted into a loving home; now they are also the adopted children of God.

"Jesus Cares has taught us to recognize the opportunities that God places before us," Brown says. "It has reminded us that ministry blessings are not necessarily financial or church membership numbers but souls for whom Jesus died, souls to whom we get to tell that good news."

Abiding Word has had a Jesus Cares program for over ten years. Each week the Jesus Cares Sunday school gathers around God's Word. On the first Saturday of each month, they meet for a craft and a snack and then head to the sanctuary for a worship service. A number of the participants have been confirmed. The program is largely led by lay members who are able to provide instruction through materials and a curriculum from The Lutheran Home Association, Belle Plaine, Minn., the parent organization of Jesus Cares.

"When you see the blessings of the ministry in this way, it reminds you that it's truly about souls and serving people with the gospel. It's not about money or finances or numbers—not that those things are necessarily bad—but it's about communicating the gospel to people," says Brown.

Learn how to begin a Jesus Cares ministry at tlha.org.



Thirteen members of a special family served by Abiding Word, Houston, Texas, were baptized in May—eight at a Jesus Cares service at the church and five more at the family's home.

Reflecting Christ's love to those facing disaster

Tornadoes, hurricanes, heavy rainfall, forest fires—it's been a busy fall for WELS Christian Aid and Relief, which responds on behalf of WELS members to reflect Christ's love to people facing natural disasters and other hardships.

As Robert Hein, chairman of Christian Aid and Relief, explains, "When we hear a natural disaster has struck a community, we contact the local pastors in the affected area and, often, the district president. These leaders may also contact us when a disaster arises."



On Sept. 1, WELS Christian Aid and Relief helped coordinate an effort with St. Paul, Brownsville, Wis., to offer aid to St. Paul's neighbors who suffered damage from an F2 tornado. More than 85 WELS members from surrounding congregations as well as community members joined together to help those in need.

A representative from Christian Aid and Relief asks these leaders a series of questions.

"How were the church, school, and called workers affected?"

"How were the members of the church affected?"

"How was the local community affected?"

"Are there ways the congregation wishes to reflect Christ's love by reaching out to meet a community need?"

As Christian Aid and Relief receives answers to these questions, the organization can determine how to support the congregation, including the level of financial support needed and whether an onsite assessment or outside volunteers may be necessary.

“We personalize our efforts working through pastors, missionaries, and churches whenever possible,” says Hein. “This allows us to have careful oversight of the projects and involves God’s people in the relief effort.”

Six disaster relief trailers stand ready to help congregations following a disaster. These trailers are stocked with items such as generators, chainsaws, rakes, brooms, ropes, buckets, helmets, and gloves. They are stored in Oskaloosa, Ia.; Pewaukee, Wis.; Stillwater, Minn.; Jacksonville, Fla.; Mobile, Ala.; and Houston, Texas.

In August and September, the trailers in Pewaukee and Stillwater mobilized to help flooding and tornado victims in Wisconsin.

Brian Roeller, a member of Salem, Stillwater, Minn., drove the Stillwater trailer to Brownsville, Wis., over Labor Day weekend to help clean-up the damage from the F2 tornado that struck there on Aug. 28. Roeller has volunteered for Christian Aid and Relief projects many times over the past five years. “I love to see the reaction on people’s faces when we show up,” he says. “Often they’re in despair, and it makes their day to see us showing Christian love.”

The Jacksonville, Fla., trailer may be mobilized to help with clean-up following Hurricane Florence. Christian Aid and Relief is staying in close contact with those congregations that have been affected by the storm and its aftermath and has already supported efforts by Amazing Grace, Myrtle Beach, S.C., and Ascension, Jacksonville, N.C., as they’ve helped community members in need.

For more information, visit wels.net/relief or visit facebook.com/WELSChristianAidAndRelief.

Scholarships encourage military veterans

“It’s just amazing how God works,” says Nicholas Mount, pastor at Grace, Geneva, Neb., and Trinity, Grafton, Neb.

Mount, a 2018 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS), Mequon, Wis., and a veteran, is referring to a scholarship he received from the Lutheran Military Support Group. Mount says the decision wasn’t easy to train for the pastoral ministry as a second-career student with a wife and family. “For us to change direction, we thought, *Where is the money going to come from?* So every time we received a scholarship, it was an answer to prayer.”

He continues, “The military connection never dies. . . . So to receive a scholarship from my brothers and sisters in the military who are also Lutheran was really special for me.”

Prof. Stephen Geiger, WLS director of financial aid, is thankful as well. “These are individuals who have decided that they are interested in serving their Lord, and one of the ways they want to serve their Lord is by serving their country. . . . And now they’re here looking to help God’s people fight in the spiritual battle. The fact that these two are coming together and they’re being thanked for their service to our country in a way that helps them pursue an even bigger mission is a beautiful thing.”

The Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG) began offering scholarships during the 2017–18 school year to military veterans or those in the reserves who are studying for the pastoral min-

istry in WELS or the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). Scholarships were presented to six WLS students and two ELS students at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary.

Erhard Opsahl, LMSG president, says the group decided to offer scholarships to encourage prior military service members to become pastors. “We would like to improve the awareness in WELS/ELS congregations of the unique sacrifices and service provided by of our military members and their families. Who better than someone who has personally experienced it?”

He continues, “In addition to the firsthand knowledge of military life and its ups and downs, prior service pastors also have a wealth of knowledge they can use for counseling their church members with many of life’s difficulties.”

Mount agrees that his military and life experiences uniquely prepared him for the ministry. He says the military taught him discipline and confidence as well as showed him his knack for languages. As an adult confirmand, his thirst for learning all he could about God’s Word spurred on his study.

Mount prays that he will be able to use his military past to make connections. “These guys are coming out of the military with questions like, ‘Did I do the right thing?’ Or the guys in combat who think, *Did I just murder somebody?* It’s so important to be there with God’s grace.”

Learn more about the Lutheran Military Support Group at lutheranmilitary.org.



In early 2018, Erhard Opsahl, president of the Lutheran Military Support Group (far left), presented scholarships to Mount (second from left) and several other Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students who served in the military.

Great news for Home Missions

The WELS Board for Home Missions celebrated a number of milestones this September. During its fall meeting, the board approved funding for three new mission starts.

“The significance of Home Missions authorizing three new missions is that we now have three more dedicated locations where first and foremost the gospel of Jesus Christ will be proclaimed,” says Keith Free, administrator of the Board for Home Missions.

New congregations are being supported in:

- **Bluffton, S.C.**, which has developed through the efforts of Risen Savior, Pooler, Ga. The new mission in Bluffton is likely to be part of a multi-site ministry effort with Risen Savior. This effort is spearheaded by Eric Janke, a 2018 graduate of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, Wis., who deferred an assignment due to his wife’s three-year residency to become a doctor. Janke has worked with Risen Savior’s pastor and members to develop a strong ministry plan for this new mission site.
- **Mansfield, Ohio**, where a Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregation is closing and contacted WELS to see if our synod might be interested in opening a mission in this area. The new mission will be buying the land and building of the former LCMS church. Some of the church’s members are planning to join the new WELS mission and are working with WELS members in the area to launch this new congregation.
- **Richland Center, Wis.**, which is part of a multi-site effort being supported by St. John, Hillpoint, and Trinity, Lime Ridge, both in Wisconsin. St. John and Trinity currently share one pastor, who has been exploring the viability of a mission in Richland Center. The area seems well suited for a WELS mission start, and members of St. John and Trinity are excited to support this effort.

These new starts are supported by a \$1 million grant from the WELS Church Extension Fund, Inc. (CEF). CEF helps provide financing so mission congregations and established congregations with mission-focused initiatives can purchase land and build or renovate a worship facility. CEF funds its loan program through individual WELS members’ and congregations’ investments in CEF financial products. CEF’s grant program is funded primarily through operating earnings of the CEF portfolio of loans and investments.

“CEF’s financials are strong,” says Scott Page, executive director of CEF, “allowing the board to approve this special grant while continuing to provide a sound investment vehicle for WELS members and congregations.”

As Free notes, “Over and above its loan and grant program, since August

2015 CEF has given more than \$4.3 million to Home Missions’ operations budget. This has helped fund many of our new mission congregations and helped enhance outreach throughout the United States, Canada, and the English-speaking Caribbean.”

Free is also excited to announce that many mission congregations launched their first public worship services in September, a milestone for these young churches. Launch services were held by Living Hope, Chattanooga, Tenn.; Intown Lutheran, Atlanta, Ga.; Good News, Lehi, Utah; Huntersville Lutheran, Huntersville, N.C.; and Grace in the Ward, Milwaukee, Wis.



For more information on WELS Home or World Missions, visit wels.net/missions. For more information on WELS Church Extension Fund, visit wels.net/cef.



Lucas Bitter, pastor at Intown Lutheran, Atlanta, Ga., preached about “A God worth knowing” in his sermon during Intown’s opening service. After the service, four first-time visitors signed up to attend a Bible basics class.



Grace, Milwaukee, Wis., one of the oldest WELS congregations, opened a second site in Milwaukee’s Third Ward earlier this year. Grace in the Ward celebrated its grand opening worship service on Sept. 16.



GOOD NEWS, LEHI, UTAH

"We had a great turnout for our first worship service," says Daniel Heiderich, pastor at Good News, Lehi, Utah. "Almost all of our core group was there. A couple of people we were able to personally invite joined in worship and stuck around for the meal. Plus, we had a couple of families come from door hangers."



LIVING HOPE, CHATTANOOGA, TENN.

"Preparing for a church grand opening can be tough," says Eric Melso, pastor at Living Hope, Chattanooga, Tenn. "You have no idea how many people will show up or how many donuts you'll need. A grand opening in a movie theater has its own challenges. Which size theater auditorium to book? Will it look full or empty? What if people fall asleep during the sermon in those nice, reclining, leather seats? As those thoughts run through your head, God simply speaks from his Word, 'Be still, and know that I am God' (Psalm 46:10). And he also proves he is a gracious God. Sixty-eight people came to be filled with hope at Living Hope's grand opening, but the most exciting part was seeing 20 new faces from the community and 18 returning prospects."



HUNTERSVILLE LUTHERAN, HUNTERSVILLE, N.C.

Doug Van Sice, pastor at Huntersville Lutheran, Huntersville, N.C., says, "As I sat in my office the day before the launch, I prayed that God would bless our launch regardless of who or how many showed up. At the end of the day, numbers are not what is most important. What is most important is that the changeless message of the gospel is preached in its truth and purity and that God's people are edified by that very truth. Not only did God bless our worship with his Word, but he blessed it with people. He brought 62 people through Huntersville Lutheran's doors. It was incredible!"

District news

NORTH ATLANTIC

Our Savior, Roanoke, Va., held its third summer robotics camp. Twenty-three children from the community attended this two-week event that began with a Bible lesson each morning.

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

Risen Savior, Mountain, Wis., held a dedication service for its new worship area on Sept. 9. The congregation remodeled a portion of its building that was purchased in 2010 to be its new worship area.

WESTERN WISCONSIN

On Sept. 9, **St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, Wis.**, dedicated its new educational facility and childcare center.

Peace, Sun Prairie, Wis., dedicated a \$5.5 million addition to its school campus on Sept. 9. Having operated with two campuses since 2006, this new phase involved closing the old campus and transitioning the entire ministry onto the newer campus.

NEBRASKA

Nebraska Evangelical Lutheran High School, York, Neb., hosted a Patriot Day program on Sept. 11 for veterans and other guests. The program focused on educating students on the military and honoring those who have served and included a guest speaker from the Lutheran Military Support Group.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

D-M—St. Paul, Roscoe, S.D., celebrated its 125th anniversary on Sept. 9.

MN—On Sept. 9, Faith, Prior Lake, Minn., celebrated its 50th anniversary.

NW—Zion, Peshtigo, Wis., celebrated its 150th anniversary on Sept. 16.

SC—On Aug. 12, Calvary, Dallas, Texas, celebrated the 25th anniversary in the pastoral ministry of **John Koelpin**.

The district reporters for this month are: D-M—Andrew Hussman; MN—Jeffrey Bovee; NA—Philip Gurgel; NE—Timothy Kemnitz; NW—Dennis Kleist; SC—Andrew Retberg; WW—Brett Brauer.

Jesus loves me

Memory, strength, and balance all fade slowly as we age, but one thing remains: Jesus' love.

Eric S. Hartzell

On Saturday afternoons, we visit some people in our town of Globe, Arizona, who don't know their own names anymore. Their minds and their memories are going away.

These people stay in one of several homes that take care of those who can't remember their names and have other related ailments and afflictions. When they are taken to those homes, everyone knows that the chances are good that they won't get well and they won't go home again. They have a room where they stay, and many of them have a roommate. They move carefully around the hallways in their wheelchairs,

or they walk slowly and uncertainly with walkers.

A SONG FOR ALL AGES

Even though they may have trouble remembering their names, there is something that many of them do remember. They remember the words of the song "Jesus Loves Me." They gather with us in little informal groups by the nurses' station or in the gathering place of the facility where, in our case most of the time, the TV is mercifully silenced. Business is going on as usual, but something wonderful happens when the song begins. Listless eyes look up. Lips start to form words. Smiles sneak across features that were blank. And sometimes down the hallway you can see people in their wheelchairs backing out of their rooms, looking our way because they hear the sound of that song.

We just sing the first verse of the song. That's the one everyone knows:

Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to him belong;
They are weak, but he is strong.

Then we sing the refrain:

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

Anna B. Warner wrote the words of the song around 1860. She wrote her song for children, and maybe that's why we like to sing it so much on Saturday afternoons. Its friendly familiarity is a comfort when the world around us gets foreign and strange—and when we forget who we are and where we are.

Jesus tells us all that unless we believe like little children, we won't enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3). In these places where these dear people are, they don't need any "big or fa-



mous” people in the room or erudite people or clever, sharp people with intellectual acumen. We are all just children singing that Jesus loves us! We are certain of that fact because the Bible has told it to us.

Our mothers taught us to sing this song when we were little. All those years ago things were different, but this one fact wasn’t and isn’t: We know that Jesus loves us. Even in the places I would not choose to go, my Jesus loves *me*! There is no disconnect between the place where I am and Jesus loving me. Even though my memory is going, this much I know: Jesus loves me! You can’t sing that song and not believe and know that Jesus loves you, regardless of what has happened to you or to your memory. The Bible tells you and me so, and we know it. Our singing right now is proof that we know it.

A SONG FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

It is possible to visit your own mother in one of these care facilities and realize that she doesn’t know you anymore. She who gave you your name all those years ago doesn’t remember your name anymore. On her bad days, she doesn’t even know her own name anymore. But try singing “Jesus Loves Me” to her just as she perhaps sang it to you and see what happens. Maybe her eyes will tell you what happens!

Perhaps someday you and I may not know our names anymore—it may come to that. But if we know that Jesus loves us, we know a great deal indeed!

We know everything needful. There is nothing better for anyone anywhere to know! Nor is there anything better to share with a parent.

Sing “Jesus Loves Me” to your father if he is having trouble with his memory. Sing it even if he isn’t! Your strong father, who may not be strong anymore, will be happy when he hears that even fathers can be weak because Jesus is strong. The song is for children and the song is for all those who are weak physically and mentally, yet still children of God.

Even though my
memory is going,
this much I know:
Jesus loves me!

Because it really isn’t about their weakness that they sing but about Jesus’ strength. Jesus is strong! Old age whittles away at a father’s perception of himself. He isn’t happy when he looks into a mirror and when he sees his hands shake and his voice quiver. But your father can smile and sing when he knows he is weak, because his Jesus is strong. It is good for the formerly proud and strong father to see himself childly weak and to realize that it really is Jesus who is strong in his life and in the lives of his family. What greater legacy can a man give his children or his grandchildren than that they heard him singing “Jesus Loves Me.”

So sing the song to him there in his room. Don’t be embarrassed to have passersby or visitors hear you singing. The work staff will be there too, maybe prowling around in the cupboard of the nurses’ station when you sing. You’ll even sometimes see these people who can’t help but eavesdrop mouthing the words and singing along. And sometimes you will see them smile and nod too.

One more thing we do on Saturday afternoons is read Psalm 23. We ask everyone who would like to join us to do so. It is surprising how many people know the words, even if they say them in King James English. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” And just listen as we get near the end of the psalm: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

This leads us to sing one more song:

I am Jesus’ little lamb;
Ever glad at heart I am.
For my shepherd gently
guides me,
Knows my needs and
well provides me.
Loves me ev’ry day the same.
Even calls me by my name.
(*Christian Worship* 432:1)

Eric Hartzell is pastor at St. Peter, Globe, Arizona.





AMBASSADORS

HELP THEM SEE JESUS



When we defend our faith, we have to be ready. We must study the Word. Jonathan P. Bilitz

"You always go back to the Bible. I like that," Dylan said as he plopped himself on a chair in my office for the third time that week. He had wandered into our building a few months earlier, and we formed a friendship. Through our visits, one thing had become glaringly obvious: Dylan hungered to hear about Jesus' love for him.

Dylan expressed a frustration with his church. He felt organized religion let him down. He had been raised in a religious system where rules needed to be followed and threats for disobedience were real. He felt stifled by the rules and concluded that he was a complete failure. He needed help. He needed hope. He needed truth. The purpose and meaning of life became his quest. He needed Jesus.

I panicked a bit about what to say. Do I defend the merit of belonging to a church and ease his discomfort with organized religion, or do I explain to him the errors of his previous church body? I decided to do neither but to read through Ephesians 2:1-10 with Dylan. He posed many questions. He

listened. We read over some of the verses again. He wanted to especially hear again verses 8,9: "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Those words led Dylan to an eye-opening conclusion. "So," he said to me, "living a good life doesn't save me?"

When sharing with others the hope that we have, our greatest weapon is being grounded in the Bible.

Dylan and I have conversed many times in the year or so since that meeting. We read the Bible together. I pray for him. He asks questions and tells me what he thinks a verse from the Bible means. He even came to church a few times. He still is not sure that he is ready to commit to join another church, but he enjoys hearing again and again the good news about Jesus. He visits me to confess his sins, because he yearns to be told he is forgiven in the blood of Jesus.

He often remarks how free he feels because he is required to do nothing to be saved. Jesus has done it all.

THE BIBLE AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

It may have been our third meeting when he brought his Bible along with him. He had been reading it and had some questions on things he was reading. I thought that was amazing! Why? I'm not sure. We never want to underestimate the power of God's Word. That Word changes hearts. It changes lives. It never returns to God empty but accomplishes what he desires and achieves the purpose for which he sent it (cf. Isaiah 55:11). God had provided me a front-row seat to watch the Spirit go to work in this young man's heart. He did that work not through my words, but through the Bible's message.

"You always go back to the Bible," Dylan said as I tried to find a section in Scripture that answered his questions. His words were a revelation to me—a sudden sincere comment I had taken for granted. I had shared the gospel with him, and it was not just human opinion. The message had divine origin.

That's the Bible—the God-breathed words that give life and salvation. The Word is the way God reveals himself and his will to us in this world. The Bible delivers vital information that is





WHAT'S YOUR STORY

What's your story? How have you shared Jesus? Every encounter is different, and we want to hear your stories. To whom in your life did you reach out? What barriers did you have to overcome? How do you prepare yourself for these outreach opportunities? E-mail responses to fic@wels.net with the subject line: "How I shared Jesus." Include your name, congregation, and contact information. Questions? Call 414-256-3231.

found nowhere else. What God highlights in his Word is Jesus. He enlightens us to see Jesus as the way to be saved. The apostles said it this way: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 Evangelical Heritage Version [EHV]). Yes, what the Bible contains is grace, the promise of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus and his cross even when—especially when—we fail.

Dylan's hunger for the life-giving gospel brought him into our building. God did the rest through his Word. God filled the emptiness with his love. He replaced fear with trust, and despair with hope. That's the power of the Word. That's the power of grace. Human words are no replacement for the message of Scripture.

To our world, wisdom is found not in the cross but in the intellect of human beings. "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Maybe we fall victim to that trap more often than we care to admit. "If only I could say the right words . . . If only I could come up with the best arguments." We don't have to come up with the best defense. God does not require us to craft the finest sounding arguments. The gospel

is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe (cf. Romans 1:16).

RELEASE THE LION

Charles Spurgeon, a 19th-century preacher, compared the Bible to a lion. To defend a lion, you simply need to let it out of its cage. So it is with the Bible. Spurgeon, when asked about defending his faith, offered his advice this way: "Many suggestions are made, and much advice is offered. This weapon is recommended, and then another. Pardon me if I offer a quiet suggestion. Open the door and let the lion out; he will take care of himself. Why, they are gone! He no sooner goes forth in his strength than his assailants flee. The way to meet infidelity is to spread the Bible. The answer to every objection against the Bible is the Bible."

That quote illustrates an important lesson when we consider defending our faith. We have the perfect defense: God's own words. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians, "Even though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage war in the way the sinful flesh does. Certainly, the weapons of our warfare are not those of the flesh, but weapons made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down thoughts such as all arrogance that rises up against the knowledge of

God, and we make every thought captive so that it is obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 EHV).

When sharing with others the hope that we have, our greatest weapon is being grounded in the Bible, the source of truth. Study the Word. Continue to be a student of the Bible. Grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. In your own heart, set apart Jesus as Lord. When it comes to answering questions, find comfort that it is not based on your own ideas but on what our mighty God has revealed in the Bible.

"You always go back to the Bible." May God bless us through his Word so that others who listen to the truth about Jesus from us recognize the Bible as the source of all blessings—especially forgiveness for sin and the sure hope of eternal life.

Jon Bilitz is campus pastor at Wisconsin Lutheran Chapel, Madison, Wisconsin.

This is the first article in a 12-part series on sharing your faith.





Soul-searching

God gives the sword to take human life. He also provides forgiveness and comfort to those troubled by the power he gives.

Paul C. Ziemer

The e-mail read, "I think I am losing my soul."

It came from a member of one of the very elite groups within the US Armed Forces at the height of combat operations in the Middle East. And it came from a new Christian.

"I AM TOO GOOD AT KILLING."

He had lived apart from God until war had made him face the very real possibility of death. Now he was facing the reality that he was very good at killing others.

During his second deployment, a buddy shared e-mail devotions with him that were sent out by WELS Military Services. When he returned, he and his wife sought out the WELS congregation near his home. They were welcomed by wives who knew what it was like to send loved ones into harm's way—and husbands who knew the burden of killing.

But most of all, they were welcomed by their Savior, and they knew it.

The warrior eagerly embraced the message of forgiveness in Jesus and adoption into his family. Another person might have used the expression, "I found faith," or "I found God." He said, "I found my soul."

When his unit was deployed again, he went with the words of "Onward, Christian Soldiers" singing in his heart. Then the music stopped. He was a highly decorated warrior, one of the best of the best. He knew what his superiors thought of him. They praised him. But now, as a Christian, he began to wonder what his God thought of him.

Thus the words, "I think I am losing my soul. I am too good at killing."

Then he did the unheard of. He asked to be removed from combat situations. His primary purpose in life had been to defend his country by killing its enemies. Now he lived to serve his Savior faithfully. He did not think he could do both.

Surprisingly, he was not rebuked for taking this step. He returned stateside as a hero and was rewarded with some choice assignments.

He was at peace—until further soul-searching found a guilty conscience. In his words, "It burned

my heart to think that I was safely in America living the good life, while my battle buddies were still fighting for their lives in the war zone.”

He returned to war with the confidence that he was serving the Lord by defending his country. He had studied through the Bible passages which declared that God had instituted the government to protect its citizens. He knew that St. Paul had written that the ruling powers did not hold the sword in vain (Romans 13). He understood that today’s warriors are given automatic weapons instead of swords.

“I know I belong here!” he wrote. “If I die here, Chaplain, I know I will see you in heaven.”

“WHY HAS GOD TURNED HIS BACK ON THESE PEOPLE?”

Once again, his soul was at peace—until something happened that made him question the love of God.

“Why has God turned his back on these people?” he asked in anguish. Then he explained why his soul was tormented.

“On my last patrol, a young woman ran up to me and begged for my help. Her nose and ears had been cut off. She said this was done by the man her parents had given her to as a bride. His excuse was that she had not obeyed him well enough.

“When she turned to her parents for help, they told her she deserved what happened. She needed to obey more quickly. The village elders told her the same thing.

“When she saw my patrol walking with the American flag patch on, she ran up, grabbed my arm, and wouldn’t let go.”

He had seen other sad sights in this turbulent country. It had made him shake his head and wonder how these people could live this way. Now he was wondering how God could allow it.

Once again, the warrior was searching for his soul. He was asking the question, “Does God not care about these people?”

The answer he received from me was the assurance that the love of God is not limited, and though there have been times in history when he rejected a nation, he had not yet done it to this one.

**“It burned my heart
to think that I was
safely in America living
the good life, while my
battle buddies were
still fighting for their
lives in the war zone.”**

“Alan, you are living proof of his love for these people who still do not acknowledge him as Lord! He sent you to be there for this woman in need. Your patrol was his rescue squad. You are there not only to take lives but also to save lives. Now you know one of the reasons you were led to return to this dangerous and desperate land. You came not just as an American. You are there as a servant of the God of grace and glory to carry out his work.”

“HE IS THE ONE YOUR SOUL IS SEARCHING FOR!”

When Baptism brought us into the kingdom of God as infants, we grew up with the Holy Spirit within our soul. As we aged, questions grew within us. Sometimes we wondered about the ways of God, and sometimes we questioned them.

But many of us knew that we already had the answers. Loving Christian relatives and teachers had given us answers even before we began to ask the questions. We merely needed to remember what we already knew.

We are an answered people. We know where to look for even more answers.

Those who come to saving faith as adults begin with a backlog of unanswered questions. Most don’t yet

know those wonderful Bible stories and probably have memorized few of the Bible verses we treasure. Those who have not yet come to faith are in greater need—even if they don’t know it.

That’s where we come in.

We might not be on patrol with an American uniform, but we are in the Armed Forces of our God. We have been recruited, trained, and deployed to a place that we describe with the words, “I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home” (*Christian Worship* 417).

We see the misery and trouble of the people who pass through our lives. We want to offer them the freedom we have and the heavenly citizenship we own. But often it seems there is little we can do and few of them want our help.

But they are watching us. Our faith is the uniform we wear. It makes some wonder if they could be like us.

They might be afraid to ask. They may be worried about the reactions of relatives and friends if they reach out to us. Yet, some of them will take that risk.

The Savior-God has not turned his back on the people with whom we mingle. He knows the needs of their souls. He knows us. He has sent us out into this world as his representatives.

When he leads people to cross our path, we will do what Alan did. We will offer them the protection of the Commander that we serve and of the angels under his command. We will point them to Jesus.

We will tell them, “He is the one your soul is searching for!”

Paul Ziemer, a retired pastor who serves as the National Civilian Chaplain for the WELS Military Services Committee, is a member at Abiding Faith, Cape Coral, Florida.

WELS Military Services offers spiritual resources for those in the Armed Forces. Sign up at wels.net/refer.

Drives me crazy!

Earle D. Treptow

When the
Spirit helps me
remember God's
extraordinary
patience with
me, I strive
to be patient
with others.

"Drives me crazy!" he said, after recounting his technology woes to a friend. Maybe you've uttered those same words, whether about technology or something else.

So, what's on your list of frustrations? What drives you crazy?

Imagine posing that question to a thousand people. A handful might likely take the high road and say that nothing really bothers them. Most, however, will be able to rattle off a list, ranging from pet peeves to more serious matters.

Sometimes it's situations and events. Sentences that begin with "Traffic that makes a 15-minute trip take an hour," or "The critter that thinks my garden is its café," or "A cell phone battery that constantly needs be recharged" all end with "drives me crazy."

Popular ideas and attitudes may also drive us crazy. Perhaps it's some political news or even some popular ideas about the Bible. When articles and books simply assume that the world evolved over billions of years, those who believe that God created the world might be annoyed. The Christian may also experience frustration at the idea that gender identity is only a social construct and not something God has designed,

Often, it's people who drive us crazy. Some act as if the rules don't apply to them. The sign says, "Clean the microwave after you use it," but you have to clean it before you can use it. Sometimes it's what people say. They know all the answers and won't listen to anything else. For example, they assert that homosexual relationships are perfectly normal and then charge us with being intolerant when we try to offer a different view. They won't allow us to explain that homosexuality isn't an unforgivable sin and that the Bible's primary message is that Jesus died for all sinners. We may well find ourselves saying, "Drives me crazy!" They drive us crazy because they defy what God has to say in his Word. They imagine that they know better than God.

Do you know the real reason people drive me crazy? It's because I've forgotten what God says people are like by nature because of the sinfulness they inherited from their parents. It's hardly shocking that those who do not know God's Word would hold a position contrary to it and speak passionately against it. I ought to expect that people might lash out against any who would speak against their views, because by nature they think God's Word is foolish.

In the final analysis, people drive me crazy because I've forgotten who I am. If I knew myself the way the apostle Paul knew himself—as the worst of sinners and an unworthy recipient of God's love—I wouldn't be so easily frustrated with others. I would recognize that, were it not for the grace of God in giving me faith, I would be thinking, speaking, and acting the very same way they do.

When the Spirit helps me remember God's extraordinary patience with me, I strive to be patient with others. I confess God's truth to those who do not know Jesus as their Savior and trust him to work through it in his time. I seek to bear with my fellow Christians in love, realizing that maybe, just maybe, I drive people crazy too. And then I thank God anew for covering me with Christ and choosing not to say of me, "He drives me crazy!"

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MAJORING ON THE MINORS

Thomas D. Kock

HAGGAI: "A NEED FOR PEACE"

Mom was visiting; the phone call about Grandpa was for her. "Your father just had a massive heart attack; we don't think he'll make it. If you want to see him, you better come now!" Shaken, Mom asked me to drive the one-hour trip.

What did we need? On the way, I suppose we could have talked about my need for a new car, our favorite football team, or politics. But with Grandpa's life hanging in the balance, none of that seemed important.

OUR REAL NEED

Haggai wrote in 520 B.C., 16 years after a small group of exiles had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. Almost immediately they began rebuilding the temple.

And then they stopped. God confronts them: "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house [the temple] remains a ruin?" (1:3). They had been busy with planting and working for themselves.

But God said, "What you brought home, I blew away" (1:9). Why? "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with your own house" (1:9). They thought they needed houses, crops, and wages, but they needed something far more important.

So many of us in America have been blessed with so much. This Thanksgiving many of us will give thanks for food, clothes, jobs, houses, cars, boats, and so much more. Yes, those are blessings!

But those aren't the things we *really* need! Racing down the interstate to try to see Grandpa, I didn't care about my car, my clothes, or the football team. God's peace—that's what I needed.

Peace was what the Israelites needed too. For them, it was connected to building God's house, so God urged them on.

GOD FILLS THAT NEED

And the Israelites listened! They resumed work (cf. 1:12-15). But this temple they built paled in comparison to Solomon's grand temple, and the people became discouraged. God asked, "Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?" (2:3).

Keep building, God told them! For God promised: "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house" (2:9). Why so? The builders needed to look forward to the coming of the Messiah. The buildings—even Herod's temple—were nothing compared to the arrival of the One who would bring peace. "In this place I will grant peace," declares the LORD Almighty" (2:9). The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus centuries later near this building would bring peace.

Peace! That's what I need. Peace of knowing that my sins are forgiven, that I'm going to heaven! Peace between me and my God! The peace that God earned—that's what I really need!

When we got to the hospital, Grandpa was dead. Or to put it far better, Grandpa was with Jesus, his Savior, and he was at peace. And so are we, now and forever.

That's what we really need.

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This is the tenth article in a 12-part series on minor prophets.

HOSEA

JOEL

JONAH

AMOS

OBADIAH

MICAH

NAHUM

HABAKKUK

ZEPHANIAH

HAGGAI

Lineage: Haggai is described only as a "prophet."

Date of writing: August–December, likely 520 B.C. Zechariah is a contemporary.

Unique fact: The words "LORD Almighty" occur about 14 times in 38 verses.

Key verse: 2:9 "'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty. 'And in this place, I will grant peace,' declares the LORD Almighty."

ZECHARIAH

MALACHI



When others abuse
us in this life,
Jesus stands firm
in his love and
compassion for
all of us.

Sorrow and outrage

My heart sinks at recent headlines. The news from Pennsylvania has shaken the Roman Catholic Church. Sexual abuse—pedophilia by high ranking clergy and ordinary priests—has become public. These allegations have also surfaced in the Philippines, Austria, South America, and India.

My heart sinks because of the victims whose lives have been altered. What frustration and anger fill their lives! The abuse stretches into the lives of those who love them and have tried to help them. Yet the help for the wounds and scars left by trusted religious leaders was inadequate. A wall of secrecy blocked efforts to heal and comfort. Those who inflicted the abuse on these boys “weaponized faith” to maintain secrecy.

My heart also sinks because of the pain many people beyond the victims and their families must now endure. They have been betrayed by their clergy. I’ve seen some turn their backs on the explanations provided, some walk out so filled with rage they cannot listen, and some protest the handling of the abuse. Still others call for the pope’s resignation.

I have no joy in what I see and how it has affected and will affect so many. But I also will not adopt the pose of a Pharisee. I cannot stand in the house of God and say, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people” (Luke 18:11). I know that our church has its own dirty laundry. I know that as long as we live in this world, our sinful flesh remains. The darkness of sin and the paralysis of weakness lurk within each of us.

My heart is heavy for those who hurt. Yet I find room for outrage. Men of power and influence preyed on the young they had trained to respect them. My outrage extends to a systematic shell game used to hide the offenders and a structure that is built on the ordinance of celibacy. Celibacy

and Holy Orders contribute to the problem. Those teachings are not biblical teachings, but human rules (Matthew 15:9).

Such tragedies have no silver lining. They are deep and dark miasmas from which there is no exit except Jesus. Indictments, trials, and exposure of sin are only the first steps toward the light of forgiveness and cleansing through Jesus’ blood (1 John 1:7). I can only advise all those broken and abused souls—victims and all others touched by this evil—to move toward the healing of Jesus. When others abuse us in this life, Jesus stands firm in his love and compassion for all of us. We should pray for them all.

Perhaps the deepest sadness I feel is that, for many, the healing power of the cross of Jesus may be difficult to find. Jesus made one complete and full sacrifice for sin, “once for all when he offered himself” (Hebrews 7:27). “It is finished,” Jesus said. That’s the great testimony of his deep love for us—a reminder that God “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all” (Romans 8:32). That love does not disappear in the abuse of others or in the great sins from which we recoil in outrage. It embraces the victims with healing and calls evildoers to repentance and renewal (Romans 2:4).

What can we all learn? Pray! The days are evil (Ephesians 5:16), and that evil is real, perverse, and relentless in its efforts to corrupt every Christian no matter what denomination. Be vigilant in preserving the Lord’s truth for its power against evil. Then also demand godly behavior from those who lead us and our congregations (1 Timothy 3).



COME Lord Jesus BE OUR GUEST

Joel S. Heckendorf

NOURISHED BY MEALS WITH THE MESSIAH

THE WEDDING SUPPER OF THE LAMB (REVELATION 19:1-9)

"Everybody, up on your feet! Put your hands together and let's hear a warm welcome for Mr. & Mrs. Joe Smith!"

Ever hear a disc jockey say something similar at a wedding reception? Music is blaring. Hands are clapping. All stand in anticipation of the bride and groom's entrance into the reception hall. It's a festive occasion.

If you are the bride or groom, as soon as you hear "Mr. & Mrs." you dance your way to the head table. There's your mom and dad at the table in front of you. Tears of joy well up as you think about everything they did for you. Then you see Grandpa and Grandma, still in love after 54 years of marriage. You see your friends and your colleagues. You even see third-cousin Betty who crashed your wedding, and you're glad she's there. You take it all in, and all you can think is, *Wow, I'm blessed.*

Blessed. What a rich word! There's something about that word that is calming, humbling, joyful, and so many other emotions wrapped up in one. *Blessed* makes you ponder. *Blessed* makes you smile.

But this is not *your* wedding supper. It's *THE* wedding supper. The apostle John had a glimpse of the eternal wedding

reception. His angelic host told him, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:9).

But we are not sitting at the table of honor yet. Today, you and I stand at the door, ready to be introduced. We know some of the guests who are already inside. We've been waiting to see some of them for a very long time. The anticipation is building.

But nothing happens. At least, not yet. And we begin to wonder: *Can we go in? Are we fit to go in? Are we ready?* As we sit in the hallway of this world, we worry about our unworthiness to be at the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And it's then that we catch a glimpse of ourselves in the mirror God put in the hallway for us. And we look stunning. "The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear" (Revelation 19:7,8). Dressed in his perfection, our Savior, the Bridegroom, grabs us by the arm, and we go in to enjoy his supper. As we sit there, we look around. There's Mom and Dad. Grandpa and Grandma. Friends. Colleagues. Betty. And more.

And then we see him, the One who promised to love us forever. The One who loved us from eternity to eternity. We see the

happiness beaming in his eyes. And as we are about to enjoy our heavenly feast, we realize, *Wow, we are blessed.*

And that's why we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus. Come, and let us be your guest."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. Say the word *blessed* out loud. List those things that make you feel blessed today.
2. Compare the previous list with what it will mean to be blessed when we're in heaven.
3. Prior to the vision of the heavenly wedding banquet in Revelation chapter 19, the apostle John sees many visions about the struggles facing the church on earth. Why?

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This is the final article in a 12-part series that looks at Jesus as a mealtime guest and how he blessed his fellow diners—and us—with his living presence. Find the article and answers online after Nov. 5 at wels.net/forwardinchrist.



More than enough

We naturally want more pie and more of everything, but God has given us more than enough of his grace. Matthew D. Rothe

My one-year old son can communicate with a few simple words. “Mama,” “shoes,” and “Da-da” are, as of this writing, all he has learned to say—and to my dismay, in that order. Despite his limited vocabulary, my son has no problem whatsoever letting us know when he wants more! It is unmistakably clear when he wants more food, more sleep, more story time, more pool time, more play time, more hugs.

WE WANT MORE

He is his father’s son. In this case it is also to my dismay. Admittedly, *more* has often been the theme of my Thanksgiving celebrations. I will have more potatoes over which I will pour more gravy than is necessary. I will eat more pieces of pie than I should. Some of us will spend more time watching football than on any other day of the year. Others will spend the day wishing more family could have gathered together, while still others will do anything to get more time in the woods. The day after Thanksgiving, Black Friday, some people will head to more stores, search for more deals, and spend more money on more things.

How’s that for irony? The holiday designated for giving thanks for what we have is often spent treating ourselves to more than what we need.

For some that’s true, but not for everyone. Many will wake up and give thanks to our Lord in worship instead of getting more sleep. Others may give more time in service to others than to self and, ultimately, more praise to God.

In all things,
at all times, we have
all that we need!

Yet can “more” negatively affect a Christian’s celebration of Thanksgiving? Of course. We naturally approach life with a scarcity mind-set. We fear we have too little and need more to be happy, comfortable, and fulfilled.

GOD’S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

What if instead of scarcity, our minds could rest in a place of sufficiency? Thankfully, sufficiency is exactly what we have! What our Savior said to Paul, he says to us too: “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:9). That means you and I have enough! God’s grace is enough. His one-way, seeking-you-when-you-run, feeding-you-before-you-knew-you-were-hungry type of love is enough.

Thanksgiving is traditionally a celebration of abundance. By grace, simply having enough is equally worthy of celebration. *Enough* is a word often used for mediocrity, but *enough* in the context of a God who “is able to bless you abundantly” (2 Corinthians 9:8) with his grace is all the reason we need to give thanks!

Our reality in Christ is that we can be thankful not only that we have enough but also that we have more than enough. Way more than enough! In all things, at all times, we have all that we need (2 Corinthians 9:8)! Because of God’s amazing grace, we have more love, more forgiveness, more peace, more happiness, more meaning, and more hope than we can possibly imagine.

This Thanksgiving, I will probably have one or three more pieces of pie than I really need, and I will inevitably end up feeling stuffed. I hope you feel full too, but not just from your Thanksgiving meal. I pray that you, whether you feel like it or not, know that you are full—stuffed full—with the abundant grace of an astounding God!

Matthew Rothe is pastor at The Way, Fredericksburg, Virginia.